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ABSTRACT

Community District Number 24 in New York City made successful inroads into meeting the educational needs of children learning English as a second language. Meeting such needs helped to contribute to the stabilization of this large residential area. Initially, the government responded to the needs of these students by providing funds for the establishment of bilingual and bicultural programs in three elementary schools at the primary level. All personnel in the program (teachers, assistant teachers, professional assistants, and resource staff) were bilingual. Native English-speaking and Hispanic children were grouped together in both English and Spanish classes. Spanish-speaking students were selected on the basis of performance on a rating scale. The curriculum consisted of reading, mathematics, and language instruction, with provisions also being made for the bilingual teaching of social studies, art, and science. With the aid of a strong curriculum, adequate staff, and community support, the bilingual program was evaluated as being successful on the basis of two major outcomes: (1) the rapid development of bilingual fluency in both the English- and Spanish-speaking groups and (2) the elimination of difficulties for non-English-speaking pupils, traditionally handicapped by a severe retardation in school achievement during the period of transition to the mastery of English. (BJD)

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BI-LINGUAL EDUCATION:

A REPORT ON A

WORKING PROGRAM

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Abstract: Bilingual Education:
A report on a Working Program

by

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Efforts to meet the educational needs of children for whom English is a second language have reached large-scale proportions. Schools, particularly in urban centers, are experiencing a major influx of children from foreign-speaking backgrounds who need to master English in order to progress in school.

Community District #24 in New York City has made successful inroads into the resolution of this problem and in so doing has contributed to the stabilization of a large residential area. The method used is to establish classes where subjects are taught to native American-born and Hispanic children grouped together, in both English and Spanish. All personnel in the program are bi-lingual and the aim of the program is multi-faceted:

1. To assist Spanish-speaking children to progress in school and to learn English at the same time;
2. To afford American children the opportunity to learn to communicate in Spanish;
3. To promote understanding and respect for the two languages, thereby establishing a cultural bond which may assist in bettering community adjustment and community relations.
4. To provide an opportunity for children, parents, school leaders and community leaders to work toward a common goal.

BI-LINGUAL EDUCATION: A REPORT ON A WORKING PROGRAM

By Irving Berchuck and Vita Tauss

The influx of non-English speaking persons to a community is frequently the impetus for a sizeable exodus of native American residents. Thus begins the process of turning the community into a ghetto, an enclosure from which mobility becomes increasingly difficult and where the avenues of natural contact and assimilation are blocked.

The urban centers of our nation have, in recent years, become the repositories of just such a pattern of community change. With the rapid absorption of large groups migrating from other countries, residential areas begin to reflect the transition in many aspects of living. Local schools in particular reflect the upsurge in non-English speaking pupils among the population, not only with a corresponding turnover in their incumbent native American population but also in the increase of pupils whose orientation to American schools and ability to communicate are lacking.

Communities recognizing a need for solutions to this potentially disruptive situation can find assistance through their local schools. Recognizing its responsibility to play a role in the stabilization of changing neighborhoods by controlling and decelerating the rate of change, many schools have established programs in bi-lingual education. The value of bi-lingual school programs is apparent in many areas but one of the more subtle benefits is the effect of facilitating a bridge of bi-lingual and bicultural communication which can promote common understanding and a willingness among persons of differing

backgrounds to remain living together and working together. Thus community change takes place gradually and stability of the environment replaces uncertainty and retreat.

So important is this aspect of education that government at all levels has responded by providing funds for the establishment of specific programs. Under the Elementary and secondary Education Act, for example, provisions exist in both Title 1 and Title 7 for program development under the auspices of the federal government. Under Title 1 which is designed to upgrade education in general and make it more responsive to the needs of local citizens, the government provides funds for skill development in three areas, reading, mathematics, and bi-lingual education. Title 7 provides further funds for the establishment of bi-lingual and bi-cultural programs in schools. In certain areas of the nation, the problems of the non-English speaking pupil have become so pervasive that the Federal government extended its existing provisions with the "Comprehensive Bilingual Education Amendments Act of 1973" which was reported in the Congressional Record on October 9, 1973. The measure provides for an increase in programs at the elementary and secondary school levels as well as higher education and teacher training provisions. Citing the importance of preserving the traditional melting pot culture of our country, sponsors of this bill made a strong case for the role of the school in fostering bi-lingual and bi-cultural exchange. This concern has been further reflected in the rise of interest and support for bi-lingual programs noted in professional journals and in a variety of federal and local government publications.

At the present time, federal and state funds are available for the establishment of bi-lingual education programs. In New York State, such programs may be funded where there is a population of ten or more foreign-speaking children in any grade.

The following is a description of a bi-lingual program in English and Spanish which has been established in a Community District in New York City and funded under Title 7 of ESEA.

In developing this program and in commencing operation promptly, the district actually anticipated the strong surge of interest in bi-lingual education and demonstrated its high priority concern for this area of school life. In New York City in particular the program predated efforts by ASPIRA, an organization dedicated to the protection of the welfare and interests of the Spanish speaking New Yorker, to provide a better instructional program for pupils of Latin-American background. ASPIRA, in its consent decree of August 1974, established an agreement with the New York City Board of Education in which specific measures would be implemented to provide intensive instruction in English, instruction in subject areas in Spanish, and reinforcement of pupils' use of Spanish to maintain fluency once a working knowledge and use of English has been established. This program has as its aim the exchange of bi-lingual and bi-cultural traditions and the provision of continuity of instruction for all children, Spanish-speaking as well as native American.

I. Background of the Program

School District #24 in the borough of Queens, New York City, takes in a number of communities which vary widely in composition. Parts of the district have traditionally been the place of

arrival of families entering the country from virtually all parts of the globe. Thus, multiple languages and cultures are not familiar to the area. In fact, the school-community administration of District 24 has always been extremely conscious of trends in foreign-speaking populations and has attempted to act upon the needs of incoming groups within the schools.

Recently, however, in certain schools, the incoming population has been largely Spanish-speaking. Records kept in the individual schools have demonstrated a definite upward trend in the numbers of Spanish-speaking families established in these communities. The concentration of these large numbers of newly arrived Spanish speaking families, has created a strong need on the part of the local school to provide a proper educational base for the children, for their families and for the existing families who are established residents of the area.

II. Structure of the Program

The bilingual program in District #24 was established in three elementary schools representing a cross-section of socio-economic levels. In each of the schools, three classes were included, one each from the kindergarten, first and second year levels, for a total of nine classes involved in the project. Funding for the program has been granted for a five year period so that these classes could continue from one grade level to the next within the program.

III. Staffing the Program

All personnel in the program are completely bi-lingual. The staff in each classroom consists of a teacher, an assistant teacher, and a bi-lingual professional assistant. The job of

these staff members is to provide the basic bi-lingual instruction to pupils in the program.

In addition to the classroom personnel, staffing for the program includes provision for resource teachers who provide remedial services in Spanish. There is also provision for school-community teachers who serve in the enrollment process of the Spanish-speaking children. Included in the services of the school community teachers are acquainting parents with the purposes of the program orienting children, and working with the Spanish-speaking community to seek out additional areas for appropriate school services designed to assist the community in becoming acclimated to their new setting.

IV. Selection of Pupils

In each of the classes in the bi-lingual program, one half of the students are Spanish-speaking and one half are native Americans. All of the Spanish-speaking children enter the program with very little or no knowledge of English at all; they are selected on the basis of performance on a rating scale for Spanish-speaking students.

Since the program is considered an enrichment program, selection of native resident pupils is, in so far as possible, from among the better students in the grade. Parent consent is a requirement for placement in the program and parents are given an orientation to the program so that selection of children becomes a joint venture between school and home.

V. Curriculum

The curriculum in the program is presented in English and Spanish, Mathematics, reading, and language skills are taught

both in English and in Spanish. Other subjects, such as social studies, art, and science may be taught in English or in Spanish or both depending upon the judgment by the teacher of the needs of the group.

The exposure of all the children to treatment in two languages of the skill areas of the curriculum has a number of purposes. First, the native American children are helped to acquire a second language. Second, the Spanish-speaking children avoid the penalty of a language handicap in receiving instruction appropriate to their age and ability. Since, traditionally, children from foreign backgrounds suffer in maintaining their learning pace, particularly in the skill areas where progress is cumulative, this method represents a major breakthrough in overcoming the problem. Another advantage of the double instruction method is that Spanish-speaking children, once pressured by necessity to abandon the use of their native tongue -- often to the sorrow of parents and relatives -- are now encouraged to retain and use their native tongue as much as possible. Finally, instruction in reading in Spanish, a completely phonetic language, is an advantage to all children in mastering the phonic method of word attack, which can be used in the development of English reading skills as well.

VI. Evaluation of the Program

With the aid of a strong curriculum, adequate staff, and the understanding and support of the community, the bi-lingual program in District 24 represents a major contribution to a field where much needed programs have been lacking.

Among the most obvious successes of the program are the rapid development of bi-lingual fluency in both the English and the Spanish speaking groups. Visitors to the classrooms have been unable to distinguish native from non-native children in either language. The second important success is that non-English speaking pupils, traditionally handicapped by a severe retardation in school achievement during the period of transition to the mastery of English are no longer faced with this problem and their education can progress smoothly.

The value of this program as an influence on community population stabilization awaits the test of time and cannot yet be predicted. However, as a means of reaching toward greater understanding through first hand experience, the role of bi-lingual and bi-cultural education offers a unique opportunity which can and should be implemented for the growth and benefit of all.

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